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Moroccan Press Under Pressure?

1.2. (U) The Casablanca prosecutor's office on December 22 accused Nouredine Meftah, publisher of the Casablanca-based Arabic weekly Al Ayyam, and Meyriem Moukrim, journalist for Al Ayyam, of "distributing false information" and "publication of photos of the Royal family without authorization" relating to the November 6 publication in Al Ayyam of an article entitled, "Secrets of the Royal Harem among Three Kings." The trial of Meftah and Moukrim is scheduled for January 23, 2006 in Casablanca where they face a possible sentence of one month to one year in prison and a fine of up to 100,000 dirhams (approximately \$11,000). Similarly, Al Ahdath Al Maghribiya, an independent Arabic daily, reported November 25 that Meftah was interrogated for four hours by Casablanca authorities about the sources of the article in question and whether he intended to harm the reputation of the King when he published the article.

Frustrated Unemployed Graduates Turn to Self-Immolation

1.3. (U) On December 15, approximately twenty members of the National Independent Group of Unemployed Degree Holders attempted to commit a collective self-immolation in front of the Ministry of Health in Rabat. All survived. Five members of the group were admitted to Ibn Sina hospital with third degree burns and others suffered less serious injuries. The individuals, all of whom reportedly held letters written by King Mohammed when he was Crown Prince promising them a job, decided to set themselves on fire to demonstrate their frustration with their inability to find employment. According to various Moroccan press outlets, the group

intended to demonstrate at the Ministry of Labor, but were stopped by police near the Ministry of Health where they set themselves on fire.

2005 National Solidarity Campaign Raises \$28 Million

14. (U) Between November 7-22, the Palace-affiliated Mohammed V Foundation for Solidarity raised 215.85 million dirhams (approximately \$24 million) and secured pledges of future contributions totaling 40 million dirhams (approximately \$4.3 million) during its eighth annual national solidarity campaign against poverty, according to a foundation press release. Established in 1999 to fight poverty, the foundation distributes food and clothes, and provides health care and shelter, to underprivileged Moroccans (reftel). This year's campaign differed from years past in that King Mohammed VI instructed the foundation to feature beneficiaries of its program in its national ad campaign rather than well-known national or international celebrities. According to the Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP), the foundation has provided some 2 billion dirhams (approximately \$217 million) toward social development priorities since its inception in 1999.

Kings OIC Speech Zeroes in on Terrorism

15. (U) In a speech at the third special summit of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in Mecca on December 7, King Mohammed VI urged Muslim countries to adopt a comprehensive approach to uproot terrorism. The King also

reiterated Morocco's "clear position which rejects all forms of terrorism, whatever their origin or devious justifications, for they are in contradiction with the tolerant teachings of Islam." He expressed his support to Saudi King Abdullah's proposal to establish an international center against terrorism. In his role as Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, the King asked the international community to face its full responsibility to stop the desecration of the holy places and ensure respect for the legal status of "Al-Quds al-Sharif."

King Orders Monument at Tazmamart Prison Site

16. (U) To honor Moroccans who lost their lives at the notorious Tazmamart secret prison, King Mohammed VI issued a royal decree ordering that the site be converted into a memorial, according to both French- and Arabic-language Moroccan press. According to the Arabic daily Assabah, Mohammed VI visited Tazmamart, located in Errachidia province and home to a military barracks, several months ago and instructed the military to evacuate the site. Assabah reported, however, that army officials did not immediately carry out the King's wish because it was made orally, and not in writing. In related news, Morocco's Equity and Reconciliation Committee (IER) proposed in its final report that the prison be turned into a monument.

Morocco and Libya Increasing Bilateral Cooperation

17. (U) At the conclusion of the seventh session of the Moroccan-Libyan Joint Higher Committee held on December 2 in Rabat, Prime Minister Driss Jettou and Shukri Ghanim, his Libyan counterpart, signed an executive program to promote cooperation in their tourism industries. According to MAP, in addition to praising the warm relationship the two countries enjoy, Jettou and Ghanim inked four cooperation agreements in the fields of justice, higher education, sea fishing, and manufacturing. The previous Committee session was held last February in Tripoli.

Morocco to Host Euro-African Migration Conference in May 2006

18. (U) Morocco announced that it will host a Euro-African ministerial conference on migration in May 2006, according to MAP. Co-sponsored by Morocco and Spain, and with additional backing from France, the conference will be the first of its kind as it seeks to bring together European and African countries to discuss ways to tackle illegal immigration. Post will provide more details as they become available.
Bush